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How To Play Go

Lesson 1: Introduction To Go

1.1 About The Game Of Go

Go is an ancient game originated from China, with a definite history of over 3000 years, although there are historians who say that the game was invented more than 4000 years ago. The Chinese call the game Weiqi. Other names for Go include Baduk (Korean), Igo (Japanese) and Goe (Taiwanese). This game is getting increasingly popular around the world, especially in Asian, European and American countries, with many worldwide competitions being held.

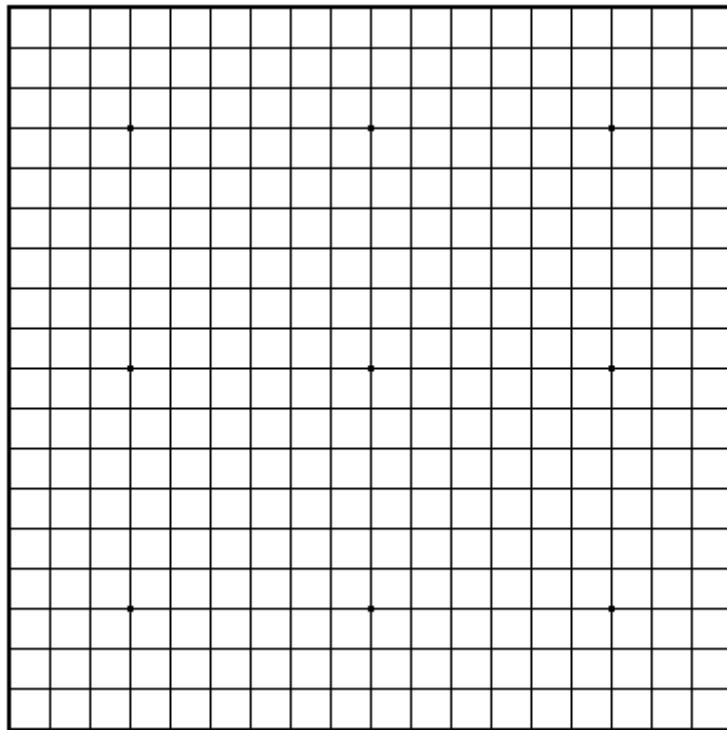


Diagram 1-1

The game of Go is played on a board as shown in Diagram 1-1. The Go set comprises of the board, together with 180 black and white stones each. Diagram 1-1 shows the standard 19x19 board (i.e. the board has 19 lines by 19 lines), but there are 13x13 and 9x9 boards in play. However, the 9x9 and 13x13 boards are usually for beginners; more advanced players would prefer the traditional 19x19 board.

Compared to International Chess and Chinese Chess, Go has far fewer rules. Yet this allowed for all sorts of moves to be played, so Go can be a more

intellectually challenging game than the other two types of Chess. Nonetheless, Go is not a difficult game to learn, so have a fun time playing the game with your friends.

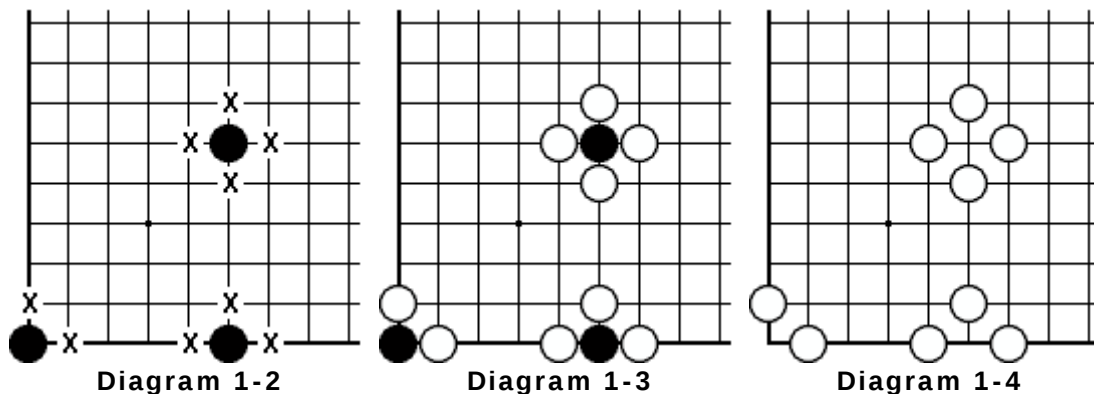
Several rule sets exist and are commonly used throughout the world. Two of the most common ones are Chinese rules and Japanese rules. Another is Ing's rules. All the rules are basically the same, the only significant difference is in the way counting of territories is done when the game ends. Sections 2 to 4 are common to all the rules.

1.2 Getting Started

A Go game is started with the board empty. Stones are placed on the intersections of the board. The player holding black stones plays first, and each player place a stone on the board on his turn. Players are free to place their stones at any unoccupied intersections on the board.

However, once the stones are placed on the board, they are not to be moved to another location. Also the stones are not to be removed from the board at will, subject to the rules explained in the following Sections. Besides, players are not allowed to stack a stone on top of another stone on the board. These are the rules that make Go unique compared to most other board games, including International Chess and Chinese Chess. The beauty of Go also lies in the simplicity of its rules.

1.3 Liberties



Liberties refer to the unoccupied intersections (or points) that are horizontally or vertically adjacent to the stone. Note: points diagonally next to a stone are not liberties of that stone. Liberties of the three black stones are marked as X in Diagram 1-2. A stone in the middle has four liberties; a stone at the side has three liberties; and a stone at the corner has two liberties.

The rule says that *stones without liberties must be removed from the board*. For example, in Diagram 1-3, the three black stones have no liberties and therefore they must be removed from the board as shown in Diagram 1-4. However, the reverse is also true: *stones with at least one liberty must remain on the board*.

Making a move that causes your stones (but not your opponent's) to have no liberties is known as suicide. Usually *suicide is forbidden*, but some variations of the rule allow for suicide, whereby the suicide move causes the stones without liberties to be removed from the board and it is the opponent's turn to play.

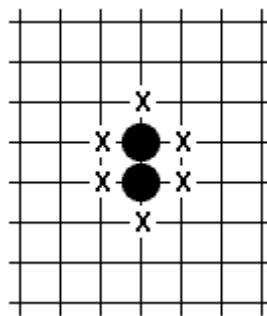


Diagram 1-5

A *chain* consists of two or more stones that are connected to each other horizontally or vertically, but not diagonally. The liberties of a chain are counted together as a unit. An example is Diagram 1-5, where the two black stones have a combined total of six liberties marked X. When white has played at all the positions marked X, such that the two black stones have no liberties at all, then white will remove the two stones together. *At no time is white allowed to remove any of the two stones individually*. As the saying goes, "One for all, all for one".

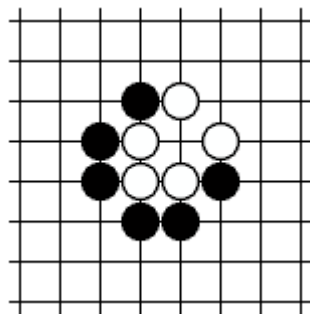


Diagram 1-6

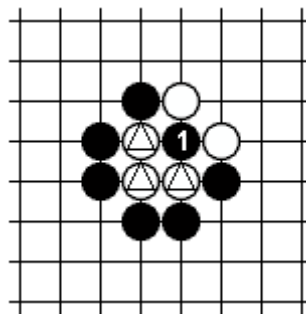


Diagram 1-7

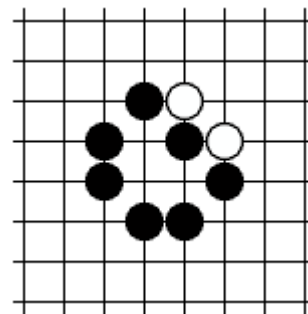
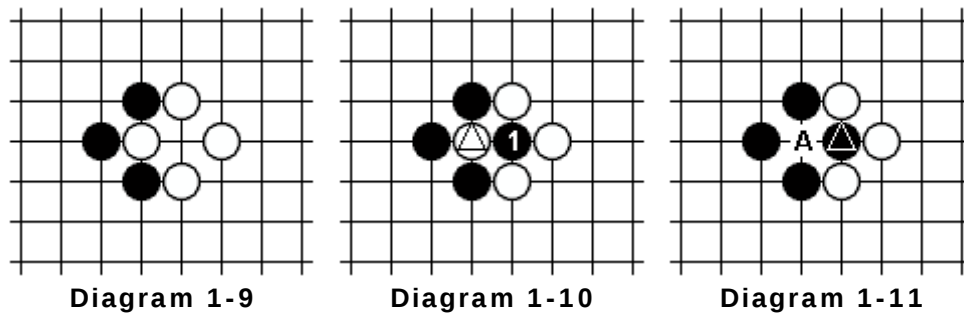


Diagram 1-8

Let's take a look at Diagram 1-6. What if black decides to play at 1 as shown in Diagram 1-7? Notice that the black stone marked 1 has no liberties, but the three white stones (marked with triangle) have no liberties either. This

rule determines the result: *the player that causes stones of both players to have no liberties will have his opponent's stones removed*. Hence, black will remove the three white stones, with the end result shown in Diagram 1-8.

1.4 Ko



We start off with Diagram 1-9, and black 1 takes away the white triangle stone in Diagram 1-10, resulting in Diagram 1-11. Now we can see that white may want to play at point A in Diagram 1-11, and the pattern goes back to Diagram 1-9. Then black decides to play at 1 at Diagram 1-10 and so on, and the game will never end. Such a pattern is known as ko.

So when black 1 takes the ko in Diagram 1-10, the rule for ko says that white has to *wait one turn* before he can take back the ko. This simply means that white cannot play at A in Diagram 1-11 on his turn immediately after black takes the ko (white can play elsewhere), but he can play at A on his next turn. If white managed to take back the ko, the same rule applies to black: black has to wait one turn before he can take back the ko.

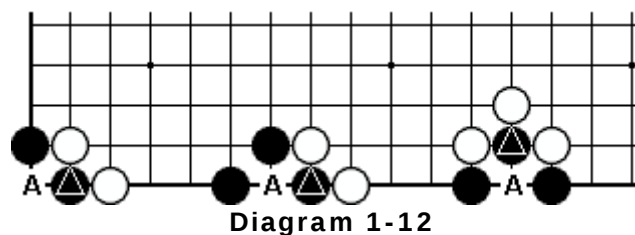


Diagram 1-12 shows other valid examples of ko, involving the point A and the black triangle stone.

1.5 Ending A Game

A game is ended when both players agree that a game has ended – both players will pass on their consecutive turns. If one player passes but his opponent choose not to pass and make a move on the board, then the game

will not end. When a game has ended, the winner is found by comparing territories (see next section – Section 6 on Territories).

Alternatively, if one player surrenders, his opponent automatically wins the game. In Go, a player may not place more than one stone on the board on his turn, so it is usual to place two stones on the board to indicate that he surrenders. This is especially useful in overcoming language barriers between players with different cultural backgrounds.

1.6 Territories

The objective of Go is to obtain more territory than your opponent. It does not really matter what is the difference – so long your territory is more than your opponent's, you win the game.

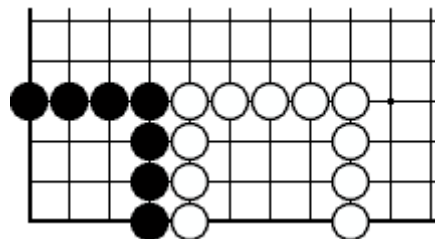


Diagram 1-13

When we count territory, we count the number of points surrounded by the stones. In Diagram 1-13, black owns a territory of 9 points; white too claims 9 points as his territory.

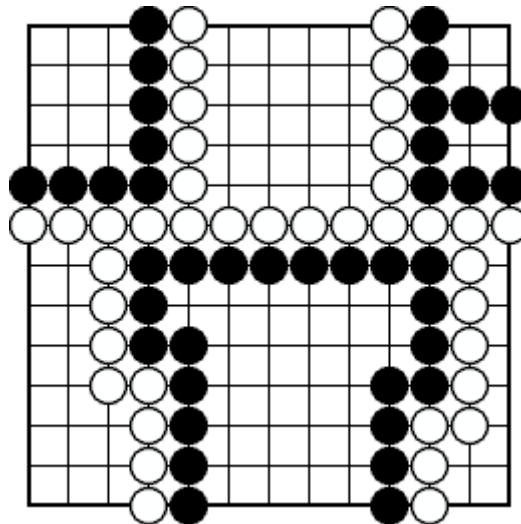


Diagram 1-14

When calculating who wins the game, due to the fact that stones can be captured or removed from the board, we take into account the number of

stones as well. Therefore we find the sum of territories and number of stones for a player, and see if it is more than the opponent's sum.

Consider Diagram 1-14, a game played on the 13x13 board. Black and white has 39 stones each. Black has surrounded 45 empty points while white has 46. Adding them together, black has 84 points and white has 85 points. Hence white wins this game.

[More Stuff] – Komi

As the black player plays the first move on the board, black has an advantage over white. So in competitions or even friendly games, black has to compensate his advantage by *automatically reducing his territory by a fixed amount known as the komi*. In 19x19 board games, the komi is usually $6\frac{1}{2}$ or $7\frac{1}{2}$ points, depending on the rules used. If black has a total of 183 points originally and the komi is $7\frac{1}{2}$ points, he would have $7\frac{1}{2}$ points deducted and left with only $175\frac{1}{2}$ points. This ensures fairness in a game.

Note that in Ing's rules, the komi is specified as 8 points, but with black winning if both players have the same amount of territory, so effectively the komi for Ing's rules is $7\frac{1}{2}$ points.

Currently, for 9x9 and 13x13 board games, there is no standardized komi.